

FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE
WITHLACOOCHEE FORESTRY CENTER
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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER ADAM H. PUTNAM

Please Respond to:
Anthony W. Petellat, Forest Area Supervisor
42 CR 538
Bushnell, FL 33513
Telephone: 352-793-2431
Anthony.Petellat@FreshFromFlorida.com

October 27, 2011

Honorable Gloria R. Hayword
Clerk of the Court
215 East McCollum Ave.
Bushnell, Florida 33513

Dear Mrs. Hayword:

Attached is our Annual Report documenting the activities of the Florida Forest Service's fire prevention and suppression program, and the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Program in Sumter County.

This report identifies the major forestry activities throughout Sumter County for the period July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011.

Should there be any questions or comments regarding this report, please do not hesitate to call this office.

Sincerely,

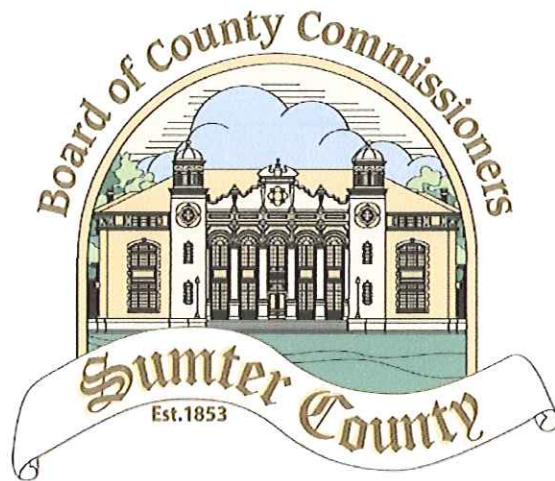
ADAM PUTNAM
COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE

Winnie Schreiber, Center Manager
Florida Forest Service
Withlacoochee Forestry Center
352/754-6757

Attachment

cc: Board of County Commissioners of Sumter County, Florida
Forest Management Bureau, Florida Forest Service
Forest Protection Bureau, Florida Forest Service

In accordance with the Cooperative Agreement
between the Florida Division of Forestry and the
Sumter County Board of County Commissioners, we
are pleased to submit this report containing the
activities of the Sumter Forest Area



For the fiscal year of
July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011

SUMTER FOREST AREA FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



Tracy Fire

Wildfire that Sumter County Forest Service Crews responded to.

OVERVIEW

The mission of the Florida Forest Service's Forest Protection Bureau is to provide an adequate level of fire protection to meet threats to life, forest and wildland resources, and other related values-at-risk.

To accomplish these goals, the Florida Forest Service has and will continue to maintain an outstanding working relationship with the Sumter County Fire and Rescue.

The Florida Forest Service and Sumter County Fire and Rescue share common radio frequencies for communications during emergency situations. Also the FFS provides Sumter Fire and Rescue with training needed to perform as wildland fire fighters and to qualify for western fire deployment with U.S. Forest Service.

WILDFIRE DETECTION

The early detection of wildfires continues to be of great importance. The Withlacoochee Forestry Center maintains several fire towers throughout the area and in addition has a full time pilot and plane to assist. The pilot and our Cessna Skylight fixed winged aircraft are utilized during high risk days to detect forest fires and lead units to the fire and forest management assignments. The Service's aviation program provides aerial assistance with wildfire suppression efforts statewide. Our closest fire suppression helicopter is stationed in Ocala, and is able to respond to the Sumter Forest Area within fifteen minutes.



Prescribed burn conducted in South Sumter County on the Richloam Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest

BURN AUTHORIZATIONS

One of the responsibilities of the Florida Forest Service is to regulate all open burning. FFS is committed to the continued training of local broadcast and land clearing pile burners, and to continually insure the integrity and professionalism of the outdoor burning program here and throughout the state. There are 20 trained and certified outdoor burners in Sumter County. The following table depicts the authorizations issued in Sumter County during the 2010-2011 fiscal year:

Burn Type	Authorized Fires	Authorized Acres	Authorized Piles
Agricultural--Pasture	526	1,358	856
Agricultural--Stubble (post harvest)	7	0	11
Agriculture--Citrus	1	0	2
Land clearing--Non-residential--Without ACI	106	0	220
Land clearing--Residential--With ACI	6	0	7
Land clearing--Residential--Without ACI	88	0	111
Silvicultural--Ecological	11	1,643	0
Silvicultural--Hazard removal	18	6,693	0
Silvicultural--Site preparation	6	61	3
Silvicultural--Wildlife	1	96	0
Total	770	9,851	1,210

Comparing the previous fiscal year to this one, there was a 74% decrease in authorized acres burned but a 38% decrease in authorized piles burned. The reason for the drastic swing can be contributed to weather; the drought that the area and Florida experienced hindered prescribed burn efforts. The weather was dry early in the season causing the FFS to place restrictions on landowners.

The FFS continues to be concerned with smoke management on pile burns, prescribed burns, and wildfires. The Forest Area Supervisor monitors all open burning in smoke sensitive areas. Burning can be restricted or stopped when atmospheric conditions are not conducive to good smoke dispersion. The FFS also responds to smoke complaints from the public when necessary to maintain air quality.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

The Florida Forest Service oversees one of the most active prescribed fire programs in the country. Statewide an average of almost 2 million acres are treated with prescribe fire each year.

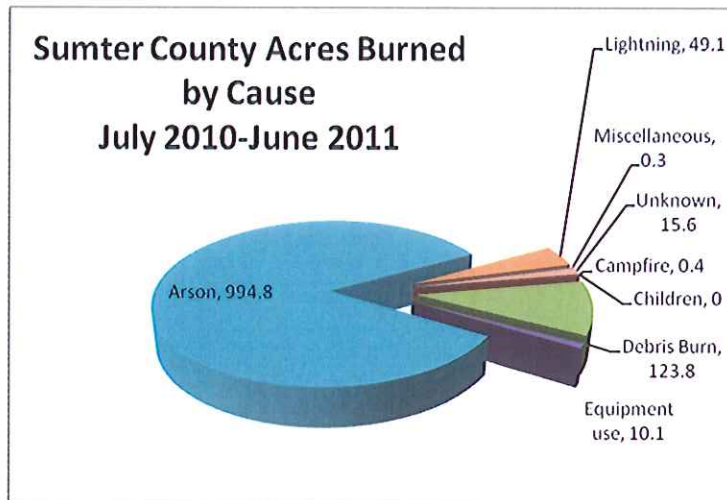
Prescribed fire is one of the most versatile and cost effective tools land managers use. Prescribed fire is used to reduce hazardous fuel buildups, thus providing increased protection to people, their homes and the forest. Other uses include disease control in young pines, improving habitat for wildlife, range management, preservation of endangered plant and animal species and the maintenance of fire dependent ecosystems.

The Sumter County Forest Area crews are responsible for the prescribed burning of the following State lands: the Richloam Tract, the Baird Unit, the Headquarters' Tract and the Croom Tract.



A dormant season burn on the Withlacoochee State Forest Headquarters' Tract.

WILDFIRE ACTIVITY



Thirty-four (34) wildfires burned 1194.1 acres in Sumter County during the fiscal year. Fifty-five percent (55%) were caused by escaped, man-caused fires; 6% were caused by equipment use; 21% were set by arsonists, and lightning igniting 12% of the fires.

During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the Sumter Forest Area was very active with wildfires throughout the State. Our local crews and equipment were on fire assignments for periods of two weeks assisting in suppression efforts. Many of the crews were on multiple details. The combined efforts of local, state, and national resources helped see Florida through one of its worst fire seasons. Unfortunately, the Florida Forest Service did lose two of our firefighters this year.



The Sumter Forest Area is actively involved with wildfire prevention programs. We have targeted all age groups; from school-age children to home/landowners. We emphasize the dangers of wildfires, why prescribe burning is a necessary tool in forest management, and homeowners are taught about the importance FireWise techniques around their homes.

Some of the programs we communicated our message were the county's Fire Safety Day, numerous school/Smokey programs, and the Sumter County Fair.

SUPPRESSION EQUIPMENT

The Sumter Forest Area has four fire fighting medium tractor/plow units, a heavy tractor with lowboy and road tractor, three 250 gallon brush engines, and three 80 gallon brush patrols are stationed throughout the County. These units were used extensively throughout the county and surrounding areas this fiscal year on both wildfire and prescribed burns.



Sumter Forest Area tractor/plow unit, brush engine, and brush patrol.

OTHER DUTIES

The Florida Forest Service has highly qualified employees who participate in the National Incident Command System (ICS). This system has proven very valuable during emergency situations, and will continue to play a major role in the future of emergency services. The FFS works closely with the other emergency services of Sumter County to ensure that efficient, safe, emergency operations are met. Each of these trained personnel are prepared to immediately respond and provide initial relief efforts to the citizens of Florida in the event of a natural disaster such as a hurricane, tornado or weapon of mass destruction event.

In addition to responding to emergency situations in Sumter County, the local Forest Service continues to provide assistance during wildfires in surrounding States and throughout the Nation.

Sumter County Cooperative Forestry Assistance Program (CFA)

FORESTS OF THE SOUTH

Southern forests cover over 200 million acres, or approximately 40% of the timberland in the United States. Diverse plant communities thrive due to our temperate climate, abundant rainfall, and topography. This forest region is referred to as the *nation's wood basket*. The forest management activity in this region provides benefits such as employment, tax revenue, habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities, clean water and fresh air. These benefits improve the quality of life for residents and help attract nature based tourism to Florida. In Florida, agriculture is the second largest sector of the economy and forestry is the largest segment within the agricultural sector. Forest industry provides jobs for 133,000 workers with a payroll of \$5 billion, and generates \$16.5 billion worth of economic activity annually in the state.

COOPERATIVE FORESTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Please note that the Florida Forest Service was known as the Florida Division of Forestry prior to July 1, 2011. The Florida Forest Service's Cooperative Forestry Assistance (CFA) Program provides technical assistance to forest landowners, government agencies, forest product industries and educators to ensure that they are aware of the best ways to manage forested lands and utilize forest resources. The CFA Forester also educates these groups about protecting water quality, controlling insects and diseases and other environmental concerns related to forestry.

Each year, Sumter County allocates \$3,000 to help support this important program which employs a full-time Florida Forest Service forester. In early FY 2010-2011 County Forester, Ray Adams, retired. On Nov 3, 2010 Arthur Clothier became the new Sumter County Forester. The County Forester provides a wide range of services for the citizens, homeowners and landowners. During FY2010-2011 these services included the following:

- Assists to landowners, 305
- Forest management planning, 8 forest management plans
- Community forestry planning, 4 assists
- Wildfire mitigation
- After hours response to wildfires, 5 fires responded to
- Reforestation projects, 2 projects
- Arbor Day Programs, 4
- Prescribed burning recommendations
- Referrals to consulting foresters, forestry contractors and other service providers, 35 referrals
- Educational programs on forestry and the environment, 20 programs
- Seedling sales, 30,000 seedlings
- Diagnosis of insect and disease problems, 74 cases dealt with
- Advising homeowners about shade tree care, 33 assists
- Advising the public about outdoor burning regulations
- State Forest Management Assistance
- Instruct at the week long FFA Forestry Camp

THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The County Forester promotes the nationally recognized Forest Stewardship Program in Sumter County. Sumter County has 22 Forest Stewardship landowners. Forest Stewards are landowners who manage their forest lands within the context of a long-term plan of objectives. The program objectives are as follows:



1. Encourage non-industrial landowners to manage their properties according to the multiple-use concept.
2. Increase awareness among the general public of the important amenities that Florida's forest lands, particularly non-industrial private forest lands, provide to all citizens of the state.
3. Improve coordination between natural resource agencies and groups, both public and private, to better serve the state's landowners and achieve common goals.

TREE CITY USA AWARDS



In 2010 the National Arbor Day Foundation recognized two Sumter County communities for their active tree care programs. The cities receiving **TREE CITY USA AWARDS** were: Wildwood 21 years and Bushnell, 16 years.

FFA FORESTRY CAMP

In July of each year since 1933 the Florida Forest Service has run a Forestry Training Camp for FFA high school and middle school students. The Florida Forest Service's commitment to this camp is so strong that not even the labor shortages caused by the Second World War or the memorable 1998 wildfire season were allowed to prevent the camp from operating.

This six-day resident camp is held at O'Leno State Park in North Florida. At Forestry Camp students learn about the many facets of forestry and FFA teachers learn different techniques for teaching the subject matter. The Sumter County Forester has lived and instructed at the Forestry Camp for one week every year since 2004.

FOREST HEALTH

The county forester educates the public about forest health issues such as non-native invasive pest plants which are a problem throughout Florida. Cogon grass, tropical soda apple, Chinese tallow, chinaberry, mimosa, camphor trees and air potato are some of the better known invasive exotic pest plants. All invasive exotics have the ability to outcompete native plants for growing space, disrupting the ecology of natural areas. Invasive exotic pest plants degrade the environment severely enough to reduce or eliminate the wildlife carrying capacity of land.

Sumter County did not experience any deadly Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) activity during FY 2010-2011. The Florida Forest Service promotes proper timber stand management to keep stands healthy and resistant to attack by SPB. The County Forester educates the public and provides incentives to implement good timber management practices through the administration of the SPB Prevention Cost Share Program. Florida's most extensive SPB outbreak occurred in 2001, when 17,600 acres of pine timber - valued at several million dollars - was lost to the beetle. The economic consequences of southern pine beetle caused timber mortality are significant.

Oak tree mortality, due to various root diseases aggravated by the stress of drought and flooding cycles, has continued to kill above average numbers of trees in Sumter County. This phenomenon has necessitated educating urban tree owners about ways to prevent stressing oak trees in order to avoid further mortality. Most commonly this is advice on watering, preventing soil compaction, pruning recommendations, and selecting shade tree species that are better suited to the urban environment.

THE AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM

The mission of the ATFS is to promote the growing of renewable forest resources on private lands while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of all benefits of productive forestry.



The County Forester promotes the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) and is a Certified Tree Farm Inspector. Sixteen forest landowners in Sumter County are members of the American Tree Farm System.

Should you have any questions concerning the report, please contact our office.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony Petellat".

Anthony Petellat
Forest Area Supervisor
Florida Forest Service
Withlacoochee Forestry Center
(352) 793-2431

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arthur Clothier".

Arthur Clothier
County Forester
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